

News Release

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USDA ANNOUNCES CURRENT USER MARKET CERTIFICATE PROGRAM (STEP 2) DATA FOR UPLAND COTTON

WASHINGTON, July 21, 1998--The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (1996 Act) authorizes payments to eligible U.S. domestic users and exporters under the Upland Cotton User Marketing Certificate Program commonly referred to as "Step 2." The 1996 Act limits total expenditures under the Step 2 program to not more than \$701 million during fiscal years 1996 through 2002. Approximately \$378 million remains available at this date.

As of July 17, (after 54 weeks of continuous payment rates), \$323.3 million of payments have been requested by participants in the Step 2 program. For the week of July 10 through July 16, a total of \$26.4 million was requested. Of this amount, domestic users accounted for \$18.7 million and exporters for \$7.7 million. Since July 11, 1997, domestic users have requested \$200.5 million and exporters \$122.8 million. The rates have ranged from a low of \$2.80 to a high of \$67.50 per 500 pound bale. The rate payable through Thursday, July 23, will be 10.37 cents per pound or \$51.85 per 500 pound bale.

This program is administered by the Farm Service Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture. All questions regarding the Step 2 program should be directed to the Deputy Administrator, Commodity Operations (202) 720-3217.

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NOTE: Farm Service Agency (FSA) news releases and media advisories are available on the World Wide Web at FSA's Home Page: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>